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26 April 1966

DCI BRIEFING FOR
RIVERS SUBCOMMITTEE

VIETNAM

North Vietnam

- I. The air war over North Vietnam has heated up considerably during the past several weeks. North Vietnamese jet fighters are showing increasing aggressiveness and willingness to mix it up with US jets.
- A. This new aggressiveness on the part of Hanoi's limited number of jets is probably due in part to the fact that US air strikes in the Hanoi-Haiphong area have been stepped up during April, and have gone after targets in the sensitive northeastern area.
- B. There have been six dogfights between US and North Vietnamese jets since April 17. Yesterday two MIG-21s jumped two F-4C Phantoms escorting a reconnaissance mission 60 miles northeast of Hanoi. The net result was one MIG-21 shot down by Sidewinder missiles.

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1. Altogether, the enemy has lost two MIG-21s and two MIG-17s in these encounters. A North Vietnamese pilot last week claimed to have shot down an F-105 Thunderchief; one missing aircraft which we attributed to ground fire could possibly have been shot down in air-to-air combat.
2. Our pilots report Chinese Communist markings on the enemy aircraft in some of these dogfights. This has gotten into the press and caused quite a bit of speculation. Actually, the North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist aircraft insignia are virtually identical--the only difference is two Chinese characters which are pretty hard to make out at Mach 2 speeds in combat.

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C. North Vietnam's jet fighter strength now stands at approximately 70 aircraft, 15 MIG-21's, and 55 MIG-15's or 17's.

1. To render these aircraft less vulnerable to US air strikes against their airfields, North Vietnam has recently deployed some of the aircraft from Phuc Yen to two newly activated airfields in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.
2. Some five additional jet-capable airfields in this area are being worked on now to prepare them for handling jets.

D. The chances are that the North Vietnamese will continue their aggressive tactics as long as US air strikes in the "heartland" of the country continue.

1. A return to their former, more cautious policy may result only if they sustain heavy losses without a reasonably high score of US planes.
2. They are probably willing to accept a higher loss rate for at least a short period of time if they can significantly increase US air losses. So far, they do not appear to be accomplishing this.

- II. There appears to have been no change recently in the North Vietnamese terms for negotiations.
- A. Earlier this week there was some interest in a report from Miss Pauline Frederick, the NBC correspondent at the United Nations. She told our delegation that an assistant Soviet press attaché had told her Hanoi would negotiate if there were a permanent stop in our bombing of North Vietnam.
1. Yesterday the Soviet mission at the UN put out an official release referring to Miss Frederick's report as a "complete fiction."
 2. The Soviet official may in fact have made that statement to her, but it does not agree with our more direct evidence on the Soviet and the North Vietnamese position.

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B. Moscow continues to refer to cessation of bombing as only the "first step" toward negotiations.

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C. Meanwhile the North Vietnamese continue to assert--as recently as this week--that their so-called "Four Points" form the only basis for a settlement of the war.

1. As you probably recall, these four points include our recognition of the National Liberation Front--the Communist political front for the Viet Cong--as the sole representative of the South Vietnamese people, and the complete withdrawal of the United States from South Vietnam.

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South Vietnamese Political Situation

III. In South Vietnam, the decree issued by the Ky government on April 14, promising elections for a constituent assembly in three to five months, has satisfied Buddhist leaders for the moment and persuaded them to call off their demonstrations.

- A. The "struggle movement" apparatus, set up by Buddhist sympathizers in the northern provinces, remains generally intact, however, and the persuasive tactics of the new I Corps commander, General Dinh, have not yet restored full government authority to the northern cities of Hue and Da Nang.
- B. Now that antigovernment groups are quieting down, the Catholics, the politico-religious sects in the delta, the Nationalist (VNQDD) and Dai Viet political parties, and other conservative groups are beginning to make their voices heard.

1. These elements tend to fear neutralist or Communist inroads as a result of a Buddhist victory in any election, and may therefore hope to have the election postponed.

IV. For the present, the Buddhists appear content to leave the Ky government and the military Directorate in power until elections are held about mid-August, but there are still numerous pitfalls which may yet endanger government survival.

- A. Chief of these is Buddhist suspicion of the government's intentions; the monks suspect that the regime may be fostering the opposition to the elections.
- B. Another danger derives from the divisions now apparent within the military--from the Directorate on down--over how to deal with the unrest.
- C. Over the longer run, differences are sure to arise over the purpose of the elections. The government considers the assembly will be elected solely to draft a constitution. The Buddhists look on it as a quasi-parliament, with power to confirm or replace the present regime.

V. Although it is too early to speculate on the election itself, most Vietnamese believe that the Buddhists will be able to dominate an elected assembly, if not as a majority, by being the only disciplined element amid a collection of squabbling factions.

A. The opportunities for Communist infiltration will depend in part on candidate screening, but evidence of at least some Viet Cong penetration of the "struggle movement" gives grounds for concern.

Military Situation

VI. Aggressive large search-and-destroy operations mounted by US and other allied forces, and coupled with almost daily bombing from B-52s and locally based aircraft, have continued to prevent the Communists from mounting any major offensives.

- A. The Communists appear further to have refrained from significant military actions at the height of the recent political crisis, probably to avoid any move which would unify the Ky government and its critics.
- B. In the past few weeks, however, the Viet Cong appear to be stepping up sporadic attacks, particularly against US airfields, isolated South Vietnamese units, and hamlets and outposts in the delta; these actions seem to be accompanied by increased terrorism in the Saigon area.
- C. The Communists are expected to continue hit-and-run tactics, while positioning larger forces for possible offensives in the northernmost provinces, the highlands bordering Cambodia, and north of Saigon as the summer monsoon period arises.
- D. The enemy continues to increase his main force strength by infiltration and internal recruitment; strength of the main force units now amounts to about 80,000 men, including 11 confirmed North Vietnamese regiments.

2. The allied forces appear to be in a better posture this year than last--both in terms of strength and intelligence--to blunt any major Communist attacks.

There may, however, be some setbacks in store for government troops.

3. There are no signs that the Viet Cong have been measurably weakened by the constant allied pressure, but they do appear to be concerned about lower morale, growing food and supply problems, defection, and in some localized instances, ammunition shortages, disease, and serious losses.

Infiltration

VII. The Communists, in spite of increasing US aerial interdiction, are continuing to move supplies south along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

- A. The US B-52 strike against the key Mu Gia Pass chokepoint appears to have had only limited success; guerrilla teams and aerial observers observed new truck movement in the Pass area only a few days after the massive attack.
- B. US pilots claim to have destroyed or damaged more than 600 trucks since 1 March, first in strikes against roads in south Laos, but despite such losses the Communists are managing to move substantial quantities of supplies south through the Laotian Panhandle toward South Vietnam.
- C. The Communists also have been improving their road net in southeastern Laos.
 - 1. They have completed a second supply route into the Laos Panhandle from North Vietnam, south of and roughly parallel to the Mu Gia artery. This new road will facilitate Communist supply movement into Laos while at the same time making the US interdiction task more difficult.

2. In south Laos, the Communists--apparently with at least the acquiescence of the Cambodians--have completed a road leading from northeastern Cambodia through the southeastern tip of Laos to the South Vietnamese border. Reports indicate that moderate amounts of rice and other foodstuffs are moving from Cambodia to South Vietnam along this route.

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